

## Smith, Patrick

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**From:** Laurie Little Dog [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 25, 2020 1:01 PM  
**To:** Smith, Patrick  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] For Public Comment (please upload to Prison Issues Board website for 2/25)

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Dear Prison Issues Board:

[\[nbcmontana.com\]](http://nbcmontana.com)

I read and watched on the news an informational piece about Montana Correctional Enterprises' work program at Montana State Prison (<https://nbcmontana.com/news/local/montana-state-prison-work-program-aims-to-lower-recidivism-rates> [\[nbcmontana.com\]](http://nbcmontana.com)). In fact, I re-read portions in order to process some of the information and quotes from Gail Butler and Joel Miller. I would like to know more about this. I would like to know where the profits from inmate-generated work ended up? Did that 20 and a half million dollars go into the State's general fund or did it just go to MCE?

I am very unsettled that these folks are not monetarily compensated for their work with a modern working wage. Honest work, is honest work, no matter where it comes from and should be compensated in a respectable manner. It is very concerning that in 2020, the State of Montana would participate in this type of exploitation. A man sweats from his brow the same... whether he's in Prison Blues or in Carhartts.

I find it rather disturbing that the fruits of slave labor are going to decorate the Governor's Office. It's appalling, really. It feels like triple-dipping. The commissioned works are finely displayed in the Governor's Office and Senate chambers, while a state contractor retains the profit by the millions from slave labor. All the while, the humans who are demonstrating "full-time", a work ethic comparable with greater society, are not able to meaningfully pay back their court fees, victim restitution and other things like child support arrears because the profits are being siphoned off by other entities.

"Made in the U.S.A." is supposed to bring a sense of pride and integrity. "Made In America" stands for skilled home-grown craftsmanship that is well-earned by an American. "Made In Montana" is not supposed to come from a sweatshop!

I would never have imagined that the sweatshop would be on American soil staffed by folks working for 36 cents an hour and topping out at Less than 8 or so dollars per day. I had thought that slavery was abolished back in 1865. Your article compelled me to do a little research. I found that the 13th amendment contains text that preserves 1800's notions allowing human servitude "if the person is convicted of a crime". The rate of pay for Montana State Prison inmates seems to be stuck in the abolition area as well. But still, I ask where is the rest of the money?

I would like to further understand how this lack of authentic compensation is being justified by Montana Correctional Enterprises. Ultimately, I believe it is time to put modern day legislation in place to ensure that incarcerated citizens in Montana, are able to be paid a figure closer to market wages and into some kind of a trust account that would be released to them upon correctional discharge. In this regard, their debts to society would be tangibly repaid.

I am confident that all Montana inmates have accrued a hefty financial debt in court fees, and restitution costs... not to mention burdens like unpaid child support. If we have inmates doing respectable work and actively participating in their

own rehabilitation, then they should not be exploited by some private prison corporation. Incarcerated citizens should be paid at a rate that allows them to effectively resolve their court costs at a decent and humane rate of repayment while accruing savings for when they get out of prison. Otherwise, this false sense of rehabilitation is a setup for failure.

I have observed the Montana Department of Corrections continually ask tax-payers for increases in funding for everything under their watch. From inmate rehab and facility repair to prison staff wage increases. It is consistently proven that when granted increased funding, the DOC still somehow needs more money. Specific monies for necessities like transitional housing expenses to keep newly released felons off the streets also have us back-tracing where the money actually went. Where did that money go?

Instead of badgering legislators for more funding, the Montana Department of Corrections should solicit funds from the MCE profiteers. After all, the inmates are in-fact, the ones who earned it!

I am very sincere when I say that this news story has triggered deep interest. I would like a follow up. I would be more than willing to meet with legislators and propose that a bill be carried to help make prison labor compensation in Montana 'right' on a moral level.

Admittedly, I am naïve to this issue, but the news story compelled me to ask questions. I am shocked this much revenue is being withheld from the laborers who invest good work. Please clarify my understanding or lack thereof.

Thank you in advance for educating Montana Citizens on these matters.

Laurie Little Dog